



International Association for the Study of Maritime Mission

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A Watershed Event in Maritime Missiology

Reflections on Paul G. Mooney's Doctoral Dissertation on "Maritime Mission in the New Millennium" (2002)
A review by Roald Kverndal

A Revolutionary Paradigm Shift

"The challenge of this moment in maritime mission is for the maritime mission societies to enable seafaring disciples to become the people of God among the people of the sea and so to become a church rather than a chaplaincy. A chaplaincy will always be something extraneous to the seafaring world." So reads a core thesis of Paul Mooney's recent ThD Dissertation. Elsewhere, he elaborates on that somewhat startling statement as follows: "The Christian's prayer is 'thy kingdom come' and the coming of the kingdom can be witnessed as authentically in a shipboard fellowship as in an ICMA executive committee meeting. . . Without commitment to the primacy of seafaring disciples in maritime mission, mission among seafarers will essentially remain at the level of Christian welfare services dedicated to seafarers but always distinct from the seafaring community."

In Response to Revolutionary Change

If a paradigm shift such as the above seems revolutionary, that is precisely the purpose Mooney proposes to pursue, given the radically changed context of contemporary maritime industry. As he puts it in his Introduction: "There has been a major revolution in the transport of cargo by sea and in the commercial and crewing practices affecting seafarers in the latter part of the twentieth century. This revolution in the maritime industry has been so profound that it demands a revolution in the practice of mission and ministry among seafarers. . . The purpose of this study is to identify an emerging para-

digim that is capable of responding to the challenges that are posed. . ."

Organization of the Dissertation

Mooney brings to the task many years of first-hand experience as chaplain-director of the (Anglican) Mission to Seafarers port ministries in both Pusan and Antwerp, as well as graduate studies in Ireland, Korea and Belgium. On 17 December 2002 he was awarded a Doctorate of Theology by the Faculty of Theology of the University of Brussels, after successfully defending his dissertation entitled: *Maritime Mission in the New Millennium: A Participative Pastoral Paradigm for Ministry and Mission in a Globalized Industry*. The contents are logically organized in five major chapters. After an Introduction in Chapter I, the author devotes Chapters II and III to the *Missiological Context* - specifically the Seafaring World and Contemporary Maritime Mission respectively. Chapters IV and V then provide the main substance of the study in the form of *Theological Foundations for Maritime Mission* - both in Theory (Chapter IV) and in Practice (Chapter V).

Changing Contexts and Obsolete Methods

In Chapter II, Mooney traces the historical development of Marine Transportation over the centuries, with special emphasis on its impact on seafaring life and work. He shows how the recent most radical

changes have combined with the negative side of globalization to reduce seafarers to a "vulnerable and increasingly alienated work force" aptly called "crews of convenience." In Chapter III, on the response of Maritime Mission over the years, Mooney builds on the historical research of colleagues in the International Association for the Study of Maritime Mission (IASMM). He has also himself supplemented this with a 32-page overview of the Development of Maritime Mission from 1779 to 1945, published by IASMM in 2000 as an Occasional Paper (No. 2). This leaves him free to focus in this chapter on the post-World War II Development of *Contemporary* Maritime Mission and its current identity crisis. Here he describes how the shift from an early 19th century Bethel Era paradigm of primarily ship-based "peer" ministry to a mid-19th century model of shore-based "chaplaincy" ministry has persisted into the present Global Era of maritime mission and ministry. *Therein lies the problem!* The revolution in maritime *industry* that was well under way in the mid-1970s has, by the turn of the 21st century, still not resulted in a corresponding paradigm shift in maritime *ministry*. In fact, Mooney comes to the shocking conclusion that conventional methodology has now become close to "obsolete." (One might perhaps paraphrase the Master's own compelling imagery in Luke 5:38 to infer that the "ferment" of new opportunities for the Gospel in a globalized maritime world calls for new "wineskins" of paradigm change in today's maritime mission.) The substance of Mooney's proposal follows in his next two chapters:

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In Theory – An Alternative Globalization

In Chapter IV, Mooney addresses the marginalizing impact of the postmodern world's phenomenon of globalization, as this affects the lives of seafarers. In response, Mooney calls for a biblical process of "re-visioning," leading to an "alternative globalization," one that builds on alternative concepts of both humanity and community. Mooney views the vision of *an alternative form of humanity* as rooted in Jesus' programmatic proclamation of the kingdom of God in Luke 4:18-19. This "kingdom agenda" commits maritime mission to a level of solidarity with seafarers that not only rejects "objectification" through exploitative practices by *maritime industry*. It must also discard paternalistic pastoral practices in *maritime ministry*. This means abandoning any strategies that see seafarers solely as passive "objects" of care, and rather empowering them as active "co-subjects" or partners in mission, as called for in Christ's Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). Only such "seafaring disciples" can authentically embody *an alternative form of community* in the seafaring world, one that can incarnate "a new way of being church" among the People of the Sea. Mooney then posits in Chapter V what it will entail to implement such a re-visioning.

In Practice – An Emerging New Paradigm

In sync with the seminal thinker in "Paradigm Theory," Thomas Kuhn, Mooney sees maritime mission history in the light of Paradigm Shifts – "qualitative leaps" in relation to previous patterns of understanding and doing things, in this case maritime mission. Most conspicuous has been the shift from an early 19th century Bethel era paradigm of ship-based "peer" ministry to a mid-19th century shore-based "chaplaincy" ministry of hospitality and welfare provision. That unilaterally agency-centered pattern has since persisted into the present Global Era. In a seafaring world that will now "never be the same," Mooney sees the challenge as a fundamental "re-definition" of maritime mission, one that entails two distinct yet interrelated tasks: (1) *A re-orientation* on the part of established seafarers' agencies from a centralist, subordinating mindset to a commitment to Christ-

like "kenosis," or self-emptying for the sake of the Gospel (Philippians 2:7). (2) *A restructuring* of maritime mission to facilitate the empowerment of seafarers themselves as the primary agents of mission and ministry, yet in synergistic partnership with seafarers' centers now playing an indispensable supportive role.

Only the Christian Maritime Ecumene – ICMA

Only the global network of the International Christian Maritime Association (ICMA) can, declares Mooney, effectively address the mission challenges raised by today's globalized industry. This applies to each of three fundamental functions called for by the emerging paradigm: (1) *Education* – training potential ministering seafarers on the basis of a common core curriculum. (2) *Validation* – certification and commissioning by the respective denominations and organizations. (3) *Coordination* – maintaining mutual follow-up contact between both seafarers and agencies. Mooney commends the Tacoma-based "Ministering Seafarers' Program" for having provided a pioneer model for such a paradigm – at least in some respects. But both this and subsequent similar programs have still lacked that key condition for sustained, broad-based engagement by agencies across the ecumenical spectrum – *denominational and cross-denominational "ownership."* Only ICMA, argues Mooney, can fulfill that condition. Just as only a simultaneous "*ownership*" by *seafarers* can enable these agencies to "penetrate the fabric" of the seafaring world and fulfill their vital supportive role. Mooney welcomes ICMA's recent involvement in "Sailing Chaplaincy" training as a "powerful symbol of solidarity" with seafarers, by means of a valuable form of ship-based ministry. At the same time, the limitations inherent in the sailing chaplaincy concept – as an agency-run professional chaplaincy – make the need for an integrated *seafarer-centered yet agency-supported* partnership paradigm as self-evident as ever.

A New Chapter in Maritime Mission History

Time will tell to what degree ICMA can and will rise to the challenge. But it is not too soon to say that the successful defense of this dissertation by Mooney marks

the opening of a new chapter in the hitherto short saga of maritime missiology. Following the first documented *history* of organized maritime mission toward the end of the 20th century, it would be left to Paul Mooney to present the first scholarly researched *theology* of maritime mission now at the dawn of the 21st century. Seen in that light, this is indeed a "watershed event" in maritime missiology. The following summary of the whole thrust of Mooney's thesis makes the stark urgency of the challenge he delivers crystal clear:

"Shore-side facilities will still be needed as centres of hospitality, resource and facilitation. But the central charge of Christ's Great Commission is to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). If seafarers' missions fail to train and empower seafaring disciples to minister on board seagoing ships, then those missions will not only have failed to respond to the challenge posed by the contemporary maritime context. They will also have failed as Christian missions obedient to the way of Jesus."

The Ven. Dr. Paul Mooney serves as the Archdeacon of the Diocese of Fern, Church of Ireland. He is the MTS chaplain in Waterford and New Ross, Republic of Ireland.

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